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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<b>H.B. 5308: AN ACT CONCERNING VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ALONG STATE HIGHWAYS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.</b>	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For nearly 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

**CFPA strongly supports H.B. 5308:** An Act Concerning Vegetation Management along State Highways by the Department of Transportation.

This is an important issue, and one that we get lots of concerned calls about at CFPA every time the Department of Transportation begins cutting trees along another state highway. Not only do trees provide many ecological and economic benefits to communities, but also they are important windbreaks, visual screens from oncoming traffic headlights, and even physical barriers that stop runaway vehicles. At the same time, trees can be public health hazards if the right trees are not sited in the right places, and if they are not properly maintained.

After Tropical Storm Irene and the October Noreaster, I served as the Chair of the State Vegetation Management Task Force that was established as an outgrowth of the Governor's Two Storm Panel in 2012. Though the focus of the report we published in August, 2012 was to achieve a balance that protected both the state's electrical infrastructure and healthy roadside trees, the need for balance in managing trees along state highways is similar.

To achieve this balance, it is important to have vegetation management guidelines that are developed by professional arborists who are able to both target for removal trees that are unhealthy or poorly sited alongside state highways, and also to target which trees are healthy and are well-suited to maintain and even plant along our highways. At the same time, it's important to have people with expertise in vegetation management who can help plan appropriately for issues that can arise after trees are removed such as an influx of invasive species.

To date, however, the primary focus of DoT's vegetation management efforts seems to be on tree removals, and although we are certainly glad to see additional efforts like the DoT pilot projects to promote pollinator habitats and to maintain some trees on Scenic Roads (as noted in DoT's February, 2018 Vegetation Management Guidelines), we would like to see balance continue to evolve along all state highways between removals, maintenance pruning for tree health, and planting of appropriate trees for Connecticut's future roadside forest.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.